



Aldersbrook Primary School Teaching & Learning Policy

Introduction

This policy, agreed in 2006, is due for review in 2009. It is substantially drawn from the DfES CPD pack called “**Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and Teaching in the Primary Years**”, published in 2004 as a support to the Primary National Strategy.

The pack includes detailed expositions of all of the effective approaches to teaching and learning that may be used in a primary school. It also explains that every approach has its place in the professional “tool-kit” of the primary school teacher.

Aldersbrook Primary School agrees with this and has, and will continue to use the materials to continually professionally develop its staff, and to retain the essential emphasis upon “excellence and enjoyment” in learning for every pupil, and thus achieve our aims (see Aims statement).

The educational philosophy embodied in the materials is broad and highly appropriate for an inclusive, multi-ethnic, London primary school in the 21st century, and will ensure that the school meets all of its stated aims. Much of the following is directly quoted from the pack.

Learning

Learning is not a singular activity; we learn in many different ways. There are several working theories about how we learn and we are constantly gaining new insights from psychology, from neuroscience and from the social sciences. The school will seek to keep abreast of these insights as they are published.

Most teachers and practitioners draw on a range of working theories and their own practical classroom experiences in arriving at their views on how children learn and how their teaching can support this learning. Research can help us to refine these views and to recognise that certain methods work best for different kinds of learning. Drawing on this, **teachers and practitioners can then use their professional experience and expertise to select appropriate methods to fit the learning needs of the children and the particular context in which these are occurring.**

Pedagogy at Aldersbrook will thus be informed by an understanding of working theories, knowledge of the social context of the learning and the practical 'craft' knowledge of teachers and practitioners. For example, research shows us that questioning with suitable wait times is a key element of 'teaching as enquiry' to promote children's concept development. **But whether this is done in pairs or as a class activity will be determined by the teacher or practitioner, based on their knowledge of the children and the particular context of the school or setting. The exact nature of the questions will be amended 'on the hoof', based on an ongoing assessment of children's learning needs at any particular point in time.**



Excellence and Enjoyment proposed a set of learning and teaching principles, which were subsequently developed following wide consultation:

- Set high expectations and give every learner confidence they can succeed
- Establish what learners already know and build on it
- Structure and pace the learning experience to make it enjoyable and challenging
- Inspire learning through passion for the subject
- Make individuals active partners in their learning
- Develop learning skills and personal qualities

These principles arise from some key understandings about learning:

- Learning has affective as well as cognitive dimensions.

Or, as it is often put, it is about the heart as well as the head. Factors such as motivation or self-esteem, and their impact on behaviour and consequently on learning, are important. **Effective teaching pays attention to these aspects of learning and this includes developing positive and supportive relationships and a positive and supportive ethos** (see the *Conditions for learning* unit).

- Learning is a process of interaction between what is known and what is to be learned.

This involves building cognitive structures - schemas, maps, concepts - by adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. **Effective teaching recognises the critical role in learning played by experiences or interactions with the surrounding environment and supports this by exploratory pedagogic approaches.**

- Learning is a social process.

When working with others learning develops through:

- shared consciousness (group interaction);
- borrowed consciousness (expert others).

This means learners can develop greater knowledge and skills when working with more expert guidance or with peers than they can attain alone. Interaction with others as well as with the environment is crucial. **Effective teaching encourages paired and group work and recognises the importance of scaffolding to support learning.**

- Learning is a situated process.

We learn in a particular context and environment. Learning can be seen as searching to create meaning from our environment. This constructivist view of learning sees teaching as assisting in the process of enquiry.

- Learning is a metacognitive process.

Initially learning may be unconscious - we learn but do not know that we know. Gradually we acquire more active conscious control - we begin to know what we know and what we don't know. **Effective teaching encourages explicit reflection on learning and seeks to make learners**



more aware of the learning processes they are using. It encourages children to develop a range of problem-solving strategies that they consciously apply in a variety of contexts.

- Learning can be seen as information processing.

This view of learning uses the analogy of the mind as being like a computer that acquires and uses information. **Effective teaching recognises the importance of direct teaching and responsive feedback.**

- Learning can be seen as self-regulation.

Effective teaching encourages the development of independence through scaffolding and carefully structured learning experiences.

Each of these working theories can inform our pedagogy and help us deepen our understanding of how to ensure that the teaching approaches we adopt are selected to ensure fitness for purpose and to personalise the learning according to the needs of the learner.

Effective teaching and its impact on learning

Many attempts have been made to identify the teaching characteristics that contribute to effectiveness. These include the competences for trainee and newly qualified teachers, the characteristics identified by Ofsted when judging teacher performance, and those generated from research projects that have sought the views of teachers and children. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, for example, suggested five key dimensions of teacher quality, based on data collected from 11 countries. These are:

- *knowledge* of substantive curriculum areas and content;
- *pedagogic skills*, including the ability to use a repertoire of teaching strategies;
- *reflection* and the ability to be self-critical;
- *empathy* and the *acknowledgement* of the dignity of others;
- *managerial* competence, as teachers assume managerial responsibilities within and beyond the classroom.

The quality of teaching is one of the factors that contribute to creating the conditions for learning. Revisiting key teaching strategies offers opportunities for reflection and self-appraisal as well as the promise of improved learning and achievement for children.

Teaching strategies are used within a pedagogic approach. Different pedagogic approaches reflect different theories about how children learn. **Teachers select from their repertoire of strategies those that will best support different kinds of learning.** This careful matching is a key part of teachers' professional expertise.

The learning environment and its impact on learning

The learning environment is made up of several factors which overlap and impact on each other in a variety of ways. In this school, we emphasise three sets of factors:



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- **ethos;**
- **behaviours and routines;**
- **the physical environment.**

The learning environments we create in schools and settings are only part of the environments the learner inhabits. While teachers and practitioners may not be able to influence the wider environments of family, community and society, research shows that the learning environment has a powerful influence on children's achievements, and that children from similar social backgrounds progress at different rates depending on the school they attend. In other words, school-level factors, including ethos, do make a difference.

Personal, social and emotional development and its impact on learning

Our focus is on five affective aspects of learning and their impact on creating the conditions in which learning can thrive. Personal, social and emotional skills impact directly on how we perceive ourselves and how we behave as learners. It is recognised that children's difficulties in learning or any reluctance to learn may be caused by such things as demotivation, fear of failure, and the impact of managing feelings on behaviour, rather than by a lack of ability.

Most teachers and practitioners would readily agree that helping children develop as confident, enthusiastic and effective learners is one of their major aims. This is because we recognise the central role of learning in our development as individuals and in the development of civilisation and society. The school can help children to learn specific skills (e.g. become better users of tools, become more fluent readers and so on) but we can also help children become better learners through helping them recognise their own learning strengths and areas for development.

There are many working theories about how children learn. Learning has both affective and cognitive dimensions and in the school considers important physical, social and emotional factors that have a profound impact on behaviour, motivation and hence learning. There are some fundamental conditions that must be in place if learners are to make the most of learning opportunities. At the most basic level, this means that physical needs for shelter, warmth, food and drink have to be met. But beyond these basic conditions there are other factors to be considered if learning is to thrive. **This school will consider factors that help create the best conditions for learning.**

Designing opportunities for learning

Learning can and does happen in a range of ways and in a variety of contexts. Learning is not always predictable - sometimes we learn in unexpected ways or learn things we did not set out to learn. Teachers and practitioners cannot totally control learning (nor would they wish to do so) but they can do much to help children develop as learners. To do this they carefully design the curriculum, taking into account:

- **the content it offers;**
- **how it is experienced, taught and assessed;**
- **how it is adapted and amended to engage all children and personalised to meet their needs and abilities.**



The school will create learning environments and learning experiences with the aim of helping children develop into confident, enthusiastic and successful learners who understand how they learn and can cooperate with others. **In order to help all children achieve their full potential, we will ensure that the learning experiences children encounter are not random, but carefully planned.**

Our planning allows teachers and assistants to design learning at both macro and micro levels. Good planning is an important aspect of effective teaching and assessment for learning. By planning, teachers and assistants can think and talk about how they can build on what children already do, know and understand, and identify what they want children to learn and the teaching that will support and develop that learning.

Good planning:

- ensures inclusion, curriculum coverage, relevance, continuity and progression;
- offers opportunities to personalise a shared curriculum so that it meets the needs and interests of learners;
- supports high standards for all

Developing a shared understanding

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Supporting children in developing these aspects of learning, and recognising their relevance across the whole curriculum, can help children become confident, well-motivated, independent learners. Children with these skills also contribute more effectively to building a community of learners and creating a social environment where learning flourishes.

Research has shown that paying attention to supporting the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills can have a positive impact on:

- educational and work success;
- behaviour;
- inclusion;
- learning;
- social cohesion.

Different levels of planning

Curriculum mapping and long-term planning

We are using 'long-term plan' to describe a plan that covers a year, or two/three year rolling programme. It sets out the range of learning opportunities that will be provided in a subject or area of learning. A curriculum map brings together the long-term plans for each subject or area of learning and covers a whole phase or more. By bringing the yearly plans together, the balance of



subjects or areas of learning and progression over a phase can be checked. In the Foundation Stage, the curriculum map or long-term plan ensures that all six areas of learning are given equal emphasis and that aspects within each area are covered regularly.

Medium-term plans

Medium-term plans usually cover a planned sequence of work for one or more subjects or areas of learning for a period of weeks, such as a half-term or term. Medium-term planning focuses on organising coherent units of work around clustered learning objectives and their outcome(s), and on the contexts for learning, learning activities and teaching that will enable the learning outcomes to be achieved.

Short-term plans

Short-term plans cover a week, a day, or a lesson, and consist of the working notes for the structure and content of a planned learning experience. These may contain details of key questions to ask, success criteria and outcomes, teaching strategies and resources, differentiation and assessment opportunities. Some of these items may be included in medium-term plans, in which case short-term plans may be very brief. The exact balance between the detail in medium and short-term plans is something to be decided within each school or setting.

Progression in key aspects of learning across the curriculum

In the introduction to the National Curriculum certain key elements of cross-curricular learning are discussed (pages 19-22). They also form the basis of the *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage*.

They include:





All of these skills are embedded within the programmes of study and early learning goals, although they are not necessarily explicitly identified within each programme or area of learning.

Such cross-curricular learning skills are often called 'learning to learn' skills. Learning to learn skills are conceptualised, categorised and labelled differently by different theorists and practitioners. What is common to all, however, is a focus on both cognitive and affective aspects of learning:

enquiry; problem solving; creative thinking; information processing; reasoning; evaluation; self-awareness; managing feelings; motivation; empathy; social skills; communication.

All of these are important learning skills and are crucial to becoming a lifelong and effective learner.

Using ICT can support learning by helping children to:

- access, select and interpret information;
- recognise patterns, relationships and behaviours;
- model, predict and hypothesise;
- test reliability and accuracy;
- review and modify their work to improve the quality;
- communicate with others and present information;
- evaluate their work;
- improve efficiency;
- be creative and take risks;
- gain confidence and independence.

Using ICT supports many of the key aspects of learning. Using ICT in learning and teaching is exemplified within nine subjects of the primary curriculum on the Primary Strategy's CD-ROM. The CD-ROM covers the six years of Key Stages 1 and 2 and six areas of learning within the Foundation Stage.

The introductory CD-ROM can be ordered from Prolog (tel. 0845 60 222 60) quoting reference 0473-2004. The PNS will continue to develop materials to support teachers in embedding the use of ICT to enhance learning and teaching.

Pedagogic approaches

Pedagogic approaches are influenced by beliefs about how children learn, the context in which the learning and teaching is to take place (including the wider social and political context) and the purpose of the learning. Most teachers and practitioners use a range of pedagogic approaches, including direct, inductive, exploratory, experiential, enquiry and problem-solving approaches as well as social or relationship approaches (such as role-play and simulation). **However, research has shown that particular approaches are most effective in supporting different kinds of learning.** Part of professional knowledge and expertise is in matching appropriate pedagogic approaches to learning needs. The chart appended summarises three main approaches used by most teachers and practitioners. **Within each pedagogic approach, teachers and practitioners will draw on a range of teaching strategies, techniques and tools, including ICT-based resources.**